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- [World](#)
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- [Student Briefing](#)

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- [Yankees](#)
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- [Knicks](#)
- [Rangers](#)
- [Islanders](#)
- [Devils](#)
- [High Schools](#)
- [Colleges](#)
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Increasing Ranks of Minority Teachers

By Olivia Winslow
STAFF WRITER

April 5, 2003

In announcing a new initiative to increase the ranks of minority teachers, Dowling College officials and U.S. Rep. Steve Israel say the potential benefits include enhancing minority student achievement and aiding the development of a more diverse and better-educated work force.

"It's exactly the kind of investment to be made in our future," said Israel (D-Dix Hills), who helped Dowling secure \$400,000 in federal funding for its new Center for Minority Teacher Development and Training.

Israel, who also helped St. John's University get federal money last year for a similar effort, said he was struck by national statistics showing that while 33 percent of public school students are African-American or Latino, only 13 percent of teachers are the same minorities. He said statistics project that the minority student population in public schools will grow over the next 10 years, but the minority teacher population will essentially remain flat.

The gulf between the number of minority students and minority teachers is even wider locally, said Clyde Payne, Dowling's associate provost for the School of Education. He concentrated only on Suffolk County, where Dowling, with campuses in Oakdale and Brookhaven, is located. Payne said June 2002 state statistics showed 24.3 percent of students in public schools in Suffolk County were minority, and only 5 percent of the teachers were minority.

Israel also worried about the lack of minority teachers in science and math, and disadvantaged school districts on Long Island serving minority communities that lack the money to provide enrichment programs available to students from wealthier school districts, programs that have led to the Island's impressive showing in the prestigious Intel science competition in recent years, for example.

"We need more resources to educate African-American and Latino teachers so they can educate the next generation," Israel said.

The educators said studies suggest minority students identify with minority teachers and look to them as role models, which could aid student achievement.

Dowling president Albert Donor said the minority training center will target not just high school seniors, but middle school students to encourage them to consider teaching as a career goal. It will provide students with mentors and other support to help them succeed academically. The college also plans to offer scholarships to students who enter the college's program.

"We are convinced that just reaching out to [high school] seniors is not sufficient," Donor said. "You have to get students much earlier. They need role models ... teaching is positive."

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Kevin Jordan, assistant director of Dowling's Higher Education Opportunity Program, said all win with the minority teacher center. "The challenge ... is to make sure the teaching profession represents our national diversity," he said, adding, "a center such as this works toward the healing of America."

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